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**KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION**

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Testimony before the Human Services Committee  
February 5, 2009

Support for HB 5230

Good afternoon, Senator Doyle, Representative Walker, and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Cheri Bragg and I am testifying today on behalf of the Keep the Promise Coalition which is dedicated to the implementation of the recommendations of the July 2000 Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Mental Health. The Coalition strongly supports HB 5230 – AN ACT CONCERNING A PILOT PROGRAM TO PROVIDE HOUSING AND SERVICES FOR TRANSITIONING YOUNG ADULTS.

HB 5230 will establish a pilot program for youth and young adults transitioning from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) without the traditionally mandated changes in their housing or service providers.

This bill would create an environment where a smooth transition is possible between two different departments. Having both departments working together will help to prevent an abrupt change in housing and service providers at age 18 and instead provide a planned, thoughtful transition period for youth and young adults with the most intensive mental health needs.

This pilot would identify youth age sixteen who will transition to DMHAS when they turn eighteen and who would require intensive interventions in order to acquire the skills necessary for success as an adult and plan for acquisition of these needed skills. These include independent living skills such as paying bills, housekeeping, cooking, the ability to act as an educated consumer, career development and other skills necessary for successful adult living in our society. Preparing these youth for successful transition to young adulthood greatly increases their likelihood of success in the adult system.

Keep the Promise Coalition recognizes that the number of referrals of young adults from DCF to DMHAS has increased more than 4,500% since 1998. This further underlines the need for planned, collaborative programming between departments. This PILOT program would provide services by an interagency team with staff with expertise in both adolescent and young adult behavioral health needs. These teams would assess the individual's developmental, educational, social, and vocational needs as well as provide training in independent living skills and mental health treatment.

This pilot program is especially important for the youth and young adults that would be served. Young adults need to make critical life decisions about the course of their life as they begin considering all of the choices, rights, and responsibilities before them. When a young adult is also challenged with a serious mental illness, it

is even more critical that this time period be as smooth as possible. Currently many youth with serious mental health needs in the DCF system have to leave both their home and their service providers at age 18. For youth that have a history of trauma and trust issues, this abrupt change can be another traumatic event. In addition, they might enter an adult system that does not necessarily provide needed specialized young adult services or they may choose not to engage in the service system at all. The result is that many of these young adults fall through the cracks of society even ending up incarcerated or homeless. For those youth who were institutionalized in residential settings for long periods of time, the transition can be exponentially more challenging. This pilot program would attempt to circumvent these types of scenarios by providing stable housing and service providers through the critical transition to adulthood.

Lastly, we would like to point out that this PILOT program proposes using existing DCF funds and could potentially help the State of CT to realize significant cost savings over time. This is a win-win for the State of CT and for youth and young adults with mental health needs in our communities. On behalf of the Keep the Promise Coalition, I thank you for your time today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Cheri Bragg  
Keep the Promise Coalition Coordinator